

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 981
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 8630

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, UR
SUBJECT: SARG ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SOVIET
UNION

REF: DAMASCUS 8572

1. SUMMARY: PUBLICITY ACCORDED TO RECENT VISITORS TO SYRIA INDICATES THAT BOTH MOSCOW AND DAMASCUS TRYING TO RESTORE BILATERAL TIES STRAINED BY LEBANESE CRISIS. ASAD SEES LIMITS TO COOPERATION WITH SOVIETS ON ECONOMIC FRONT. RECENT MEETING OF PRES. ASAD WITH SYRIAN COMMUNIST PARTY POLITBURO SUGGESTS ASAD TRYING TO RELIEVE INTERNAL PRESSURES ON HIS REGIME. WE SUSPECT SYRIANS WILL URGE SADAT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION IN ORDER TO REOPEN MILITARY SUPPLY LINE. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING PAST TEN DAYS WE HAVE NOTED SYRO-SOVIET
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EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RECENTLY STRAINED RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION STEMMING FROM DIFFERENCES OVER SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON. MOST VISIBLE SIGN WAS WEEK-LONG VISIT OF DELEGATION REPRESENTING SOVIET COMMITTEE FOR SOLIDARITY WITH ASIAN AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES, HEADED BY ITS DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, VLADIMIR KUDRYAVTSEV. GROUP ARRIVED DEC. 6 AND

MET AT AIRPORT BY AHMAD AL-ASAAD, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF SYRIAN BRANCH OF COMMITTEE; SALMA NAJIB, PEOPLE'S COUNCIL (PARLIAMENT) FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON; KHALID AL-FAHUM, HEAD OF PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL, AND OTHERS.

3. WELCOMING SPEECH BY ASAAD CONTAINED EXPRESSION OF HOPE THAT VISIT "WILL CONSOLIDATE STRONG FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN OUR PEOPLES." KUDRYAVTSEV TOLD SANA CORRESPONDENT THAT HE HOPED TO EXCHANGE VIEWS WITH LOCAL COMMITTEE "TO COORDINATE OUR JOINT EFFORTS DURING THE COMING YEAR." HE ALSO PLEDGED SUPPORT FOR ME PEACE BASED UPON ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND GUARANTEE OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS INCLUDING RIGHT TO ESTABLISH "NATIONAL INDEPENDENT STATE," ADDING THAT "WE ARE EXERTING OUR EFFORTS TO LAUNCH A INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN IN SOLIDARITY WITH STRUGGLE BEING WAGED BY SYRIAN PEOPLE AGAINST ISRAELI AGGRESSION."

4. DELEGATION THEN BEGAN ROUND OF VISITS THAT INCLUDED: TOUR OF KUNEITRA; MEETING BETWEEN KUDRYAVTSEV AND ASAAD; AND MEETING WITH BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER AND DIRECTOR OF SYRO-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY MUTIB SHANAN.

5. TWO SIDES ISSUED JOINT COMMUNIQUE AT CONCLUSION OF VISIT WHICH STRESSED "THE SPECIAL IMPORTANCE OF SYRO-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION AND JOINT CONCERN FOR STRENGTHENING AND PROMOTING RELATIONS." STATEMENT CRITICIZED "AMERICAN IMPERIALISM AND ZIONISM" FOR TRYING TO CREATE DIFFERENCES
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AMONG ARABS AND FOR UNDERMINING ARAB SOLIDARITY. IT APPEALED FOR SOLUTION TO ME CRISIS BASED UPON COMPLETE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS, AND EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF CONVENING GENEVA CONFERENCE WITH COMPLETE PLO PARTICIPATION. CONCERNING LEBANON -- FOCAL POINT OF SYRO-SOVIET TENSIONS DURING PAST SUMMER -- BOTH SIDES "EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH CESSATION OF FIGHTING AND EMPHASIZED JOINT CONCERN FOR RESTORATION OF NORMAL LIFE ON BASIS THAT LEBANESE WILL SETTLE THEIR OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS PEACEFULLY, TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE LEGITIMATE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE." STATEMENT REAFFIRMED SUPPORT FOR PLO, AND CONCLUDED WITH MENTION OF INVITATION TO VISIT USSR EXTENDED TO SYRIAN BRANCH OF COMMITTEE WHICH WAS ACCEPTED. DELEGATION DEPARTED DAMASCUS DEC. 13.

6. PRESS REPORTED TWO OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST. FIRST, SOVIET YOUTH DELEGATION SCHEDULED TO VISIT SYRIA BEGINNING DEC. 18. SECONDLY, PUBLICITY WAS AFFORDED TO MEETING

BETWEEN SAIQA COMMANDER ZYHAYR MUHSIN AND SOVIET JOURNALIST TO DISCUSS OUTCOME OF PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL SESSION AND SYRO-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS.

7. AMONG LESS VISIBLE SIGNS OF RETURN TO NORMALCY WAS REPORT CONTAINED REFTEL THAT, IN AFTERMATH OF RECENT COUP ATTEMPT BY SYRIAN OFFICERS, PRES. ASAD INITIATED MEETING WITH COMMUNIST PARTY OF SYRIA (CPS) POLITBURO TO SEEK CPS HELP IN IMPROVING TIES. SOURCE INTERPRETED THIS INITIATIVE AS EFFORT BY ASAD TO SHORE UP HIS LEFT FLANK DOMESTICALLY. (REFTEL).

8. IT APPEARS THAT PRES. ASAD SKEPTICAL OF LIMITED BENEFITS TO SYRIA FROM IMPROVEMENT OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH USSR. SYRIAN SOURCE RECENTLY TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT WHEN MINISTER OF PLANNING AT RECENT CABINET MEETING PROPOSED SOVIETS BE CONSULTED REGARDING CERTAIN QUESTIONS RELATED TO STATE FARMS, ECONMIN DEMURRED AND OFFERED COUNTER-PROPOSAL THAT SYRIA STUDY WESTERN AGRICULTURAL CONFIDENTIAL

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MODEL MORE CLOSELY. PRES. ASAD AT THAT POINT INTERJECTED LIGHT-HEARTED REMARK ABOUT SUCH OPEN CRITICISM OF SOCIALISM, WHICH SIGNIFIED TO ECONMIN, ACCORDING TO SOURCE, ASAD'S WILLINGNESS TO ADMIT HIS OWN DOUBTS ABOUT COURSE PURSUED BY BAATH PARTY WITH ALMOST RELIGIOUS FERVOR SINCE ITS ASSUMPTION OF POWER.

9. COMMENT: IT SEEMS CLEAR FROM NUMBER OF SOVIET VISITORS AND MEDIA PLAY ACCORDED THEIR VISITS THAT BOTH DAMASCUS AND MOSCOW ARE INTERESTED IN PATCHING UP QUARREL THAT AROSE AS RESULT OF LEBANESE CRISIS. JOINT STATEMENT ISSUED AT CONCLUSION OF SOLIDARITY DELEGATION STRESSED AREAS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO SIDES, INCLUDING COMMON LANGUAGE ON LEBANON, AND REITERATED SUPPORT FOR CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE. PRESENCE OF FAHUM TO WELCOME THIS DELEGATION AND PUBLICITY GIVEN TO SOVIET JOURNALIST'S SESSION WITH ZYHAYR MUHSIN SUGGEST THAT DAMASCUS IS AT SAME TIME TRYING TO EXTRACT MAXIMUM MILEAGE FROM IMPROVING ITS TIES WITH SOVIETS TO PROMOTE EXCHANGES WITH PALESTINIAN LEADERS BACKED BY SYRIA BUT STILL UNPOPULAR WITH ARAFAT GROUP IN PLO. ASAD MEETING WITH CPS POLITBURO, REPORTEDLY TO RELIEVE INTERNAL PRESSURES ON REGIME, MAY PARTIALLY INCREASE SOVIET LEVERAGE ON DAMASCUS AS SARG IN PROCESS OF FORMULATING ITS STRATEGY VIS-A-VIS PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL. ASAD'S REMARK AT CABINET MEETING, HOWEVER, INDICATES THAT IMPROVEMENT IN TIES WILL NOT NECESSARILY ADVANCE BILATERAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS OR REVERSE WESTERNIZING TRENDS IN SYRIAN ECONOMY. WE SUSPECT THAT IN CAIRO ASAD WILL BE PUSHING SADAT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION IN ORDER TO REOPEN MILITARY SUPPLY LINE AND ESTORE EGYPTIAN MILITARY CAPABILITY. ASAD BELIEVES THAT A CREDIBLE MILITARY ALTERNATIVE IS NECESSARY TO ENABLE ARABS TO ACHIEVE THEIR

GOALS IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

MURPHY

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